



LECTURE WITH JOEL BLECHER

ISLAM IN THE AGE OF THE SPICE TRADE: GLOBALIZATION WITHOUT EMPIRE?

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RESEARCH BUILDING „WELTBEZIEHUNGEN“ C19.00.02/03

In the Western imagination, the spice trade is often portrayed as the spark for the European “Age of Discovery”, as explorers from Venice, Genoa, Lisbon, and Amsterdam set sail in search of a new passage East, ushering in an era of modern globalization that began in 1492. But if we begin our story a century earlier – in the wake of the Black Death – the story of the spice trade would have at its center the overlapping networks of Muslim scholars and merchants who transformed religious and commercial life in ports across the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Because there was no great military conquest that immediately preceded its formation, this ‘Age of the Spice Trade’ was also a time of globalization without empire – or more precisely, globalization in a time of petty empires – where religious and economic connections thickened across the world, even though military ones were thinning.

In this talk, Professor Joel Blecher will offer a preview of his current book project by exploring a few episodes from this understudied chapter in world history, illuminating how competing Islamic sensibilities of justice and oppression in matters of trade helped bind together an emerging economy that was linked across vast distances, while also being flexible to change as Muslims ventured into new parts of the world.

ALL GUESTS WELCOME – NO REGISTRATION NECESSARY

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